

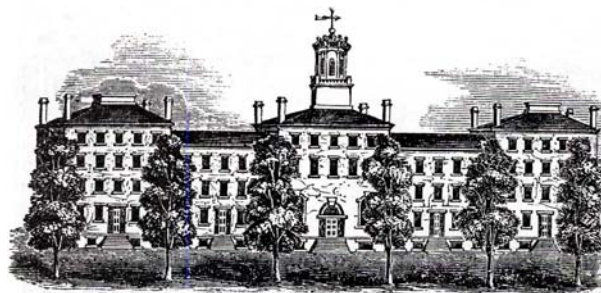
**Ezra A. Huntington House, c. 1861**  
**11 Seminary Street**  
**Auburn, New York**

**Significance: Represents abolitionist and Underground Railroad activity of Auburn Theological Seminary**



November 2004, Looking NE

Built in 1861 as a residence for Rev. Dr. E.A. Huntington, Professor of Biblical criticism at Auburn Theological Seminary, this building is the only remaining pre-Civil War structure of the Auburn Theological Seminary that once occupied this entire block. This house represents the national and international importance of this biracial Presbyterian seminary, as well as the impact of its students and teachers on abolitionism and the Underground Railroad. A hidden attic room may have been built as an Underground Railroad safe place, although no written documentation substantiates this.



*Auburn Theological Seminary.*

From John W. Barber and Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the State of New York* (New York: S. Tuttle, 1842).

Founded in 1819 under the direction of President D.C. Lansing, Auburn Theological Seminary became, along with Union Seminary in New York City, one of the main centers for training Presbyterian ministers in the nineteenth century. In the debates over slavery, revivalism, and theology that divided many

Sites Relating to the Underground Railroad, Abolitionism, African American Life

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Protestant denominations in the pre-Civil War years, Auburn was in the eye of the hurricane. The early commitment of many of its students and faculty to abolitionism, as well as its willingness to accept African American students, placed it clearly in the camp of reformers and contributed to the division in 1837 of Presbyterians into separate northern and southern churches.

African American students included Andrew Harris, from the Cayuga Presbyterian parish, a graduate of Middlebury College, who preached in Philadelphia until his death in 1836., and Rev. Brother Holmes, who preached in Brooklyn in the 1860s.<sup>1</sup>

In March 1834, students at Auburn Theological Seminary started one of the first antislavery societies in New York State. By 1836, forty-two of the seventy-five students enrolled at Auburn (or 56 percent of the student body) belonged to the society, They held monthly prayer meetings, and “no discussions,” they assured the public, “have been held, . . . without the consent, either expressed or tacit, of the Faculty.” On July 30, 1836, the adopted the following resolutions, which they published in the *Friend of Man*, the newspaper of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society:

Resolved, That the existence of Slavery in this country, being hostile to the genius of our government and the spirit of the gospel—interfering vitally with the cause of human rights, and crippling the energies of the American Church, calls for the immediate, united and decisive action of every friend of God and man.

Resolved, That as prospective ministers of the cross, we feel ourselves imperatively called upon, while in a course of preparation for the vast responsibility of the holy office to which we aspire, “to remember those who are in bonds as bound with them”—to extend the sympathies and charities of our souls to every being created in God’s image, especially to those whose rights are wantonly outraged—to act on the firm ground of enlightened, Christian principle, and to take a deep and lively interest in all the moral questions which are agitating the religious community, and stand intimately connected with the salvation of men.

Resolved, That we regard the free and untrammelled discussion of the subject of Slavery as by no means “*foreign* to the purpose for which we are here assembled,” but on the contrary, as perfectly accordant with that purpose and a solemn duty which we owe ourselves, the millions of suffering colored brethren, and the church of God, in which we expect soon to become public teachers.

Resolved, That while we are unwilling to endorse all the language employed by the friends of immediate emancipation as *faultless*, we are prompt to say, as far as we are acquainted, that it exhibits in the main that spirit of love and adherence to moral principle which accords with the Gospel.

Resolved, That the measures of the Abolitionists instead of having a *tendency* to increase the severities of the masters towards the slaves, are designed and calculated to melt the oppressor’s heart, and restore the oppressed to the possession of their divinely chartered rights. Was Moses chargeable with the increase severity inflicted upon his brethren by their oppressors, when he demanded their immediate emancipation from Egyptian bondage?

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<sup>1</sup>Florence Pharis McIntoch, *History of Cayuga Village* (1927), 62; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 251-52. Thanks to Anthony Gerow for finding these references to Andrew Harris. Reference to “Rev. Mr. Holmes” is from Junius, “Brooklyn Correspondence,” *The Christian Recorder*, September 12, 1863. *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, July 30, 1852.

Resolved, That while we firmly adhere to our principles, relying on divine aid for success, we will study to cultivate a spirit of forbearance and kindness towards those who do not agree with us in sentiment, on this important and vital question.

T.T. Bradford, president.  
H.S. Redfield, Secretary.  
Auburn, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1836<sup>2</sup>

Because of Auburn Theological Seminary's importance, its ideas influenced debate throughout the Presbyterian General Conference. These abolitionist sentiments undoubtedly contributed to the split in the national body at its national meeting in Philadelphia the following year. There, issues of slavery combined with theological disputes led the General Conference to excise almost every presbytery in upstate New York from the national body.

In 1838, the student antislavery society was undoubtedly responsible for generating signatures on two antislavery petitions sent to Congress. The first was sent by students and professors of the Auburn Theological Seminary on February 12, 1838, and asked Congress to abolish slavery in Washington, D.C. and in the territories and to abolish the slave trade. It included two columns of signatures. Sheila Tucker, Cayuga County historian, checked these signatures against Seminary records and found the following names listed as either students or faculty at the Seminary:

Albert C. Willson  
Francis Child  
Edwin Reynolds  
Daniel Gibbs  
Lewis Hamilton  
E.B. Fancher  
Nehemiah Cobb Jr.  
Charles O. Mill  
Samuel C. Wilcox  
Henry Bannister  
O. Fraser  
Elliot H. Payson  
Ransom R. Kirt  
Erasmus M. Kellogg  
Horan M. Crasit  
William M. Hoyt  
Hannibal Smith  
John E. Claghorn

On a second petitions sent from Auburn in 1850, more than half of the signers were associated with the seminary, including the following:

Amon Spencer  
Sidney H. Barteau  
Francis H. Sulye  
J.E. Blakely  
A. Fergrison  
H.B. Morgan  
Alfred M. Stowe  
John Campbell  
Richard G. Keyes  
T.D. Austin  
William A. Niles

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<sup>2</sup> *Friend of Man*, August 11, 1836.

Daniel B. Lyons  
 J.C. Moses  
 Robert H. Booth  
 Martin L. Gaylord  
 William A. Fox  
 Edward D. Morris  
 C.L. Adams  
 David E. Blair  
 George G. Smith  
 Stephen Summix  
 A.H. Lilly

Some of these, perhaps most of them, carried their antislavery commitments into work outside the Seminary. In 1852, a student named Bascom was involved with the biracial abolitionist McGrawville College in Cortland County, where, reported Frederick Douglass, he delivered an address that “exhibited considerable talent; but the speaker labored so hard to say witty and pretty things, and went so far aside from his subject to make his attack on those ladies who wear the Bloomer Costume, as to show most clearly that he had mistaken his own qualifications, the character of his hearers, and the claims of the occasion.”<sup>3</sup>

Rev. Charles Anderson, who graduated from the Seminary in 1843 and went to the Sennett Congregational Church, where he and his wife, Elizabeth, used the parsonage as an active stop on the Underground Railroad. According to Anderson’s obituary, “so great an interest did he take in the Southern slave that his home in Sennett, while he was a pastor of a congregation there was made one of the underground stations for runaway bondsmen and much of his time was occupied in caring for the fugitives.”<sup>4</sup> In 1856, Harriet Eglin, freedom seeker from Maryland, stayed several months with the Andersons and wrote three letters to William Still, keeper of the main safe house in Philadelphia, which Still published in his 1872 book, *The Underground Railroad*.<sup>5</sup>

Faculty members sympathetic to abolitionism most likely included Samuel Miles Hopkins, professor of church history, who arrived at the Seminary in 1847. His sister, Sarah Bradford, worked in 1868 with Harriet Tubman to record and publish the first book-length version of Tubman’s life history.<sup>6</sup>

The Rev. E.A. Huntington came to the Auburn Theological Seminary in 1855 as professor of Biblical criticism. A graduate of Union College, he had been pastor of Third Presbyterian Church in Albany for eighteen years before coming to Auburn. For most of his tenure, Huntington served not only as a faculty member but as virtual president of the seminary. He retired in 1893, at the age of 80, but he remained active as professor emeritus until his death in 1901.

Built in 1861, Huntington’s house on Seminary Avenue<sup>7</sup> served as his residence from then until his death in 1901. The house is stucco, with wide unsoffit eaves. It has a large gable with asymmetrical wings on each side and another wing to the rear. Windows on the first and second floor have flat lintels. Those on the front of the main gable have six-over-six sashes. Several windows on the wings have four-over-four sashes. Some are side-by-side, with four-over-four sashes and a mullion down the middle. Simple Florentine windows in the attic gables reflect an Italianate influence, as do the porch supports.

<sup>3</sup> *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, July 30, 1852.

<sup>4</sup> Church records, as transcribed by Sheila Tucker; Obituary for Rev. Charles Anderson, *Auburn Daily Advertiser*, January 4, 1900; “Graduates and Students Auburn Theological Seminary,” *General Biographical Catalogue of Auburn Theological Seminary, 1818-1918* (Auburn: Auburn Seminary Press, 1918), 85

<sup>5</sup> William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia, 1872), 221-23.

<sup>6</sup> *History of Cayuga County* (1908), 182.

<sup>7</sup> *History of Cayuga County*, 185.

In 1863, Rev. E. A. Huntington pronounced the benediction at the funeral of Morgan “Luke” Freeman, an African American barber born in slavery in 1803, who kept an Underground Railroad station in Auburn for 29 years.<sup>8</sup> Although we have found no other evidence connecting Huntington’s name with any abolitionist or Underground Railroad activity, the house does contain two intriguing hidden rooms with a cistern in the attic. Could these have been built as possible hiding places?

In 1903, James R. Cox, former law associated of William Henry Seward, recalled that “the fugitives that came to Auburn were, during the summer time, hidden in the Theological Seminary.”<sup>9</sup>

Research assistance by Sheila Tucker and Anthony Gero.

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<sup>8</sup> *Auburn Daily Advertiser*, April 11, 1863.

<sup>9</sup> James R. Cox interviewed by Elbert Wixom, “The Under Ground Railway in the Finger Lakes Country,” B.A. Thesis, Cornell, 1903, 30.